



ORFORD STRING QUARTET

(QUARTET-IN-RESIDENCE)

ANDREW DAWES, *violin*

TERENCE HELMER, *viola*

KENNETH PERKINS, *violin*

MARCEL ST-CYR, *cello*

SUNDAY, MARCH 28, 1976 AT 3 P.M.
WALTER HALL, EDWARD JOHNSON BUILDING

String Quartet, Op 44, No.2, in E minor

Mendelssohn

Allegro assai appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro di molto

Andante

Presto agitato

This quartet, written in 1837, was the first of the three Op.44 quartets to be completed. Mendelssohn's only other minor-key string quartet, Op 13, has a more conservative tonal organization than the present work. There is a greater abandon in the juxtaposition of tonalities in Op.44, as well as in the structuring of movements.

The wealth of textural contrasts found in the first movement is counterbalanced by the relative similarity of its two main thematic ideas. The recapitulation, which begins without ceremony, is the most interesting section of the movement. Much is left out, and that which remains is often drastically altered. The harmonic alterations at the beginning of the second theme and at the three-fold repetition of the incisive rhythmic pattern near the coda invite repeated listenings. This section is more intriguing in terms of development than the middle section of the work.

The second movement is one of the best examples of the lively, ethereal scherzo of which Mendelssohn was so fond. By the 1830's, the term had lost the formal implications granted it by Beethoven; Mendelssohn, Chopin and Brahms each employed the term in different manners. The alternation of scherzo and trio had become archaic, and this movement loosely conforms to sonata-rondo procedures. Two of the scherzo's most interesting features are the numerous hemiola rhythms and the unexpected lyrical viola theme just before the return of the main theme and just before the end.

A rather abrupt tonal leap from the scherzo (tonic major) leads to the third movement (relative major). This lyrical movement is propelled by steady 16th-note figurations, except for two contrasting sections which provide rhythmic variety. Like the first movement, the return of the opening is ingeniously altered in texture.

The finale rivals the first movement in length and importance. Three distinct melodic ideas are presented, merging well from one to the next, and several interesting octave doublings occur throughout the movement. The three-fold repetition of the second motive is reminiscent of a similar passage in the first movement. The recapitulation is particularly full and varied and there is an extended coda.

Quartet No.2, Op 17

Bartok

Moderato

Allegro molto capriccioso

Lento

Bartok composed his second string quartet between 1915 and 1917 when he was in his mid-thirties. In comparison to the first quartet (1908) this is a fully mature, idiomatic work. No definite key can be assigned to it, but the tonal centre upon which Bartok builds is A.

The first movement, Moderato, is in modified sonata form with first and second subject groups which, though contrasted, share a heightened, expansive lyricism and a common tonality. During the recapitulation, besides considerable extension of thematic elements, there are many gradations of tempo and dynamics, building to a coda of considerable intensity.

The subsequent Allegro molto capriccioso is in effect a scherzo in extended rondo form. Its main subject, distinctly folk-like in character, explores juxtapositions of major and minor thirds, and outlines two tritones, intervals that pervade the entire movement. Sforzandi on strong beats only partially serve to offset the ferocity of Bartok's syncopations. A prestissimo section in two simultaneous time-signatures, six against four, leads to a coda in which the four instruments resume in unison their initial fluctuation between major and minor thirds.

The concluding Lento, tonally the most elusive movement, is no less intense and uncompromising. In his Suite Op.14, of 1916, Bartok had already made the somewhat unorthodox choice of concluding a work with a slow movement.

Intermission

String Quartet, Op 59, No.1, in F Major

Beethoven

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto

Allegro: Theme russe

This quartet is perhaps Beethoven's greatest essay in the string quartet medium before the five late quartets. The first movement alone defies any attempt to do the quartet justice in so short a space. One may mention the "Protean" opening theme (as Kerman has labelled it), which pervades the movement and dwarfs the other two melodic ideas, but to illustrate the manifold possibilities inherent

in, it and brought out by Beethoven during the course of the movement is impractical. Virtually all of the development section is occupied with it in whole or fragmented form, and its second statement in the first violin near the end of the exposition becomes the basis for the fugato section in the middle of the movement. This is quite an achievement for a theme which, when first presented, acted merely as an extended tonal anacrusis to the establishment of F major 20 bars into the movement. Beethoven's sense of drama is most clearly evident here and at the end of the exposition, where he feigns a repeat but suddenly moves into remote tonalities for the middle section.

The Allegretto similarly presents a theme - or rather, a rhythmic monotone without accompaniment, alternating in glib dialogue with a melodic fragment - which pervades the entire structure, yet tonally serves only to introduce a more lyrical idea in B-flat major. This disappears as quickly as it enters, as do the three other melodic fragments during the course of the movement. Rhythmic, tonal and textural surprises abound - contrametric patterns and unusual juxtapositions of chords and instrumental registers combine to create a mood of austere frivolity.

The slow movement is particularly expansive, and the 'pizzicato' writing in the middle section provides an effective and much-needed contrast. This Adagio sets off the Russian folk tune of the fourth movement effectively by concluding with a violin cadenza which leads into the finale without stop. The cadenza is in itself quite undistinguished, but the passage is indispensable, for without it the change from the deeply-felt Adagio to the relatively slight final Allegro would be too anticlimactic. Despite its brilliance and masterful craftsmanship, the finale seems rather out-of-touch with the rest of the quartet, and is certainly no complement for the breadth of the first movement. One is reminded of the opening Allegro of the 'Eroica', although the treatment of the cycle is more convincing in the symphony than in the quartet. This does not deny the value of each movement of the quartet considered in itself, and the work contains some of the most sublime moments in Beethoven. (Notes on Mendelssohn and Beethoven quartets by L. De'Ath).

Next Event: April 2, 3, 9, 10 at 8 p.m. OPERA PRODUCTION

THE MINES OF SULPHUR (Richard Rodney Bennett)